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HOWITT

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MABEL ON MIDSUMMER DAY

A Story of the Olden Time

BY MARY HOWITT

ILLUSTRATED IN SILHOUETTE BY HELEN M. HINDS

BOSTON
JAMES R. OSGOOD AND COMPANY
1881

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MABEL ON MIDSUMMER DAY.

MABEL ON MIDSUMMER DAY.

PART I.

"ARISE, my maiden, Mabel,"
The mother said, — "arise,"
For the golden sun of midsummer
Is shining in the skies.

"Arise, my little maiden,
For thou must speed away
To wait upon thy grandmother
This livelong summer day.

"And thou must carry with thee
This wheaten cake so fine,
This new-made pat of butter,
This little flask of wine.

"And tell the dear old body
This day I cannot come;
For the goodman went out yester-morn,
And he is not come home.

Mabel on Midsummer Day.

"And, more than this, poor Amy
Upon my knee doth lie:
I fear me with this fever-pain
The little child will die!

"And thou canst help thy grandmother;
The table thou canst spread;
Canst feed the little dog and bird;
And thou canst make her bed.

"And thou canst fetch the water
From the lady-well hard by;
And thou canst gather from the wood
The fagots brown and dry.

"Canst go down to the lonesome glen
To milk the mother-ewe:
This is the work, my Mabel,
That thou wilt have to do.

"But listen, now, my Mabel,
This is Midsummer-day,
When all the fairy people
From Elf-land come away.

"And, when thou art in the lonesome glen,
Keep by the running burn,
And do not pluck the strawberry-flower,
Nor break the lady-fern.

Mabel on Midsummer Day.

"But think not of the fairy-folk,
  Lest mischief should befall:
Think only of poor Amy,
  And how thou lov'st us all.

"Yet keep good heart, my Mabel,
  If thou the fairies see,
And give them kindly answer
  If they should speak to thee.

"And, when into the fir-wood
  Thou go'st for fagots brown,
Do not, like idle children,
  Go wandering up and down,

"But fill thy little apron,
  My child, with earnest speed,
And, that thou break no living bough
  Within the wood, take heed.

"For they are spiteful brownies
  Who in the wood abide:
So be thou careful of this thing,
  Lest evil should betide.

"But think not, little Mabel,
  Whilst thou art in the wood,
Of dwarfish wilful brownies,
  But of the Father good.

Mabel on Midsummer Day.

"And, when thou goest to the spring
To fetch the water thence,
Do not disturb the little stream,
Lest this should give offence.

"For the queen of all the fairies,
She loves that water bright:
I've seen her drinking there myself
On many a summer night.

"But she's a gracious lady,
And her thou need'st not fear;
Only disturb thou not the stream,
Nor spill the water clear."

"Now all this I will heed, mother,
Will no word disobey,
And wait upon the grandmother
This livelong summer day."

PART II.

AWAY tripped little Mabel
With the wheaten cake so fine,
With the new-made pat of butter,
And the little flask of wine.

And long before the sun was hot,
And morning mists had cleared,
Beside the good old grandmother
The willing child appeared.

And all her mother's message
She told with right good-will,
How that the father was away,
And the little child was ill.

And then she swept the hearth up clean,
And then the table spread;
And next she fed the dog and bird;
And then she made the bed.

Mabel on Midsummer Day.

"And go now," said the grandmother,
"Ten paces down the dell,
And bring in water for the day,—
Thou know'st the lady-well."

The first time that good Mabel went,
Nothing at all saw she,
Except a bird, a sky-blue bird,
That sate upon a tree.

The next time that good Mabel went,
There sate a lady bright
Beside the well,—a lady small,
All clothed in green and white.

A courtesy low made Mabel,
And then she stooped to fill
Her pitcher at the sparkling spring;
But no drop did she spill.

"Thou art a handy maiden,"
The fairy lady said:
"Thou hast not spilled a drop, nor yet
The fair spring troubled.

"And for this thing which thou hast done,
Yet mayst not understand,
I give to thee a better gift
Than houses or than land.

Mabel on Midsummer Day.

"Thou shalt do well whate'er thou dost,
As thou hast done this day;
Shalt have the will and power to please,
And shalt be loved alway."

Thus having said, she passed from sight;
And nought could Mabel see
But the little bird, the sky-blue bird,
Upon the leafy tree.

"And now go," said the grandmother,
"And fetch in fagots dry:
All in the neighboring fir-wood,
Beneath the trees, they lie."

Away went kind, good Mabel,
Into the fir-wood near,
Where all the ground was dry and brown,
And the grass grew thin and sear.

She did not wander up and down,
Nor yet a live branch pull,
But steadily, of the fallen boughs,
She picked her apron full.

And, when the wild-wood brownies
Came sliding to her mind,
She drove them thence, as she was told,
With home-thoughts sweet and kind.

But all the while the brownies,
  Within the fir-wood still,
They watched her how she picked the wood,
  And strove to do no ill.

"And oh! but she is small and neat,"
  Said one, "'twere shame to spite
A creature so demure and meek,—
  A creature harmless quite."

"Look only," said another,
  "At her little gown of blue,
At her kerchief pinned about her head,
  And at her little shoe!"

"Oh, but she is a comely child,"
  Said a third; "and we will lay
A good-luck-penny in her path,
  A boon for her this day,
Seeing she broke no living wood,
  No live thing did affray."

With that the smallest penny,
  Of the finest silver ore,
Upon the dry and slippery path,
  Lay Mabel's feet before.

With joy she picked the penny up,
  The fairy penny good,
And with her fagots dry and brown
  Went wondering from the wood.

Mabel on Midsummer Day.

"Now she has that," said the brownies,
"Let flax be ever so dear,
'T will buy her clothes of the very best
For many and many a year."

"And go now," said the grandmother,
"Since falling is the dew,
Go down unto the lonesome glen,
And milk the mother-ewe."

All down into the lonesome glen,
Through copses thick and wild,
Through moist, rank grass, by trickling streams,
Went on the willing child.

And, when she came to lonesome glen,
She kept beside the burn,
And neither plucked the strawberry-flower,
Nor broke the lady-fern.

And, while she milked the mother-ewe
Within the lonesome glen,
She wished that little Amy
Were strong and well again.

And, soon as she had thought this thought,
She heard a coming sound,
As if a thousand fairy-folk
Were gathering all around.

And then she heard a little voice,
  Shrill as the midge's wing,
That spake aloud, — "A human child
  Is here; yet mark this thing, —

"The lady-fern is all unbroke,
  The strawberry-flower unta'en!
What shall be done for her who still
  From mischief can refrain?"

"Give her a fairy-cake!" said one;
  "Grant her a wish!" said three;
"The latest wish that she hath wished,"
  Said all, "whate'er it be!"

Kind Mabel heard the words they spake,
  And from the lonesome glen
Unto the good old grandmother
  Went gladly back again.

Thus happened it to Mabel
  On that Midsummer day,
And these three fairy blessings
  She took with her away.

'Tis good to make all duty sweet,
  To be alert and kind;
'Tis good, like little Mabel,
  To have a willing mind.

"Arise, my maiden, Mabel,"
The mother said, — "arise."

"But, listen, now, my Mabel,
This is Midsummer day."

Away tripped little Mabel
With the wheaten cake so fine.

"Oh, but she is a comely child,"
Said a third; "and we will lay
A good-luck-penny in her path,
A boon for her this day."

With joy she picked the penny up,
The fairy penny good,
And with her fagots dry and brown
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And, while she milked the mother-ewe
Within the lonesome glen,
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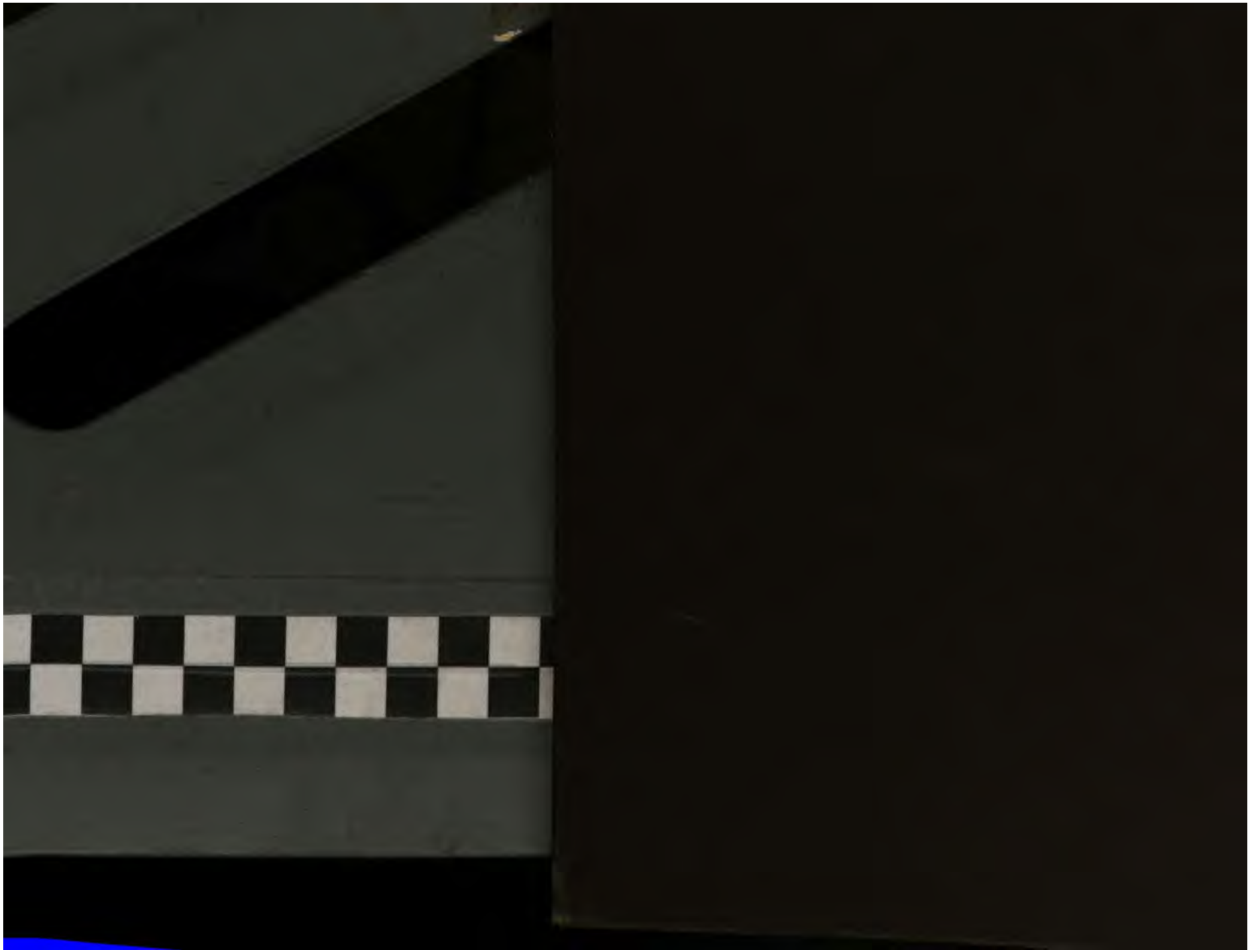
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